

The Somerset Levels

Naturetrek Tour Report

3 - 5 February 2017



Northern Shoveler and European Wigeon



European Wigeon



Wells Cathedral

Tour report & images compiled by Andrew Bray



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Tour participants: Dave Nevitt & Andrew Bray (leaders) with 16 Naturetrek clients

Summary

We had a fantastic weekend in good weather on the Somerset Levels. We visited lots of reserves around the Levels, seeing 76 species of birds and learning to identify a number by sight and sound. Although the Starlings were spread out along miles of reedbeds, we saw huge flocks come in to roost, and we were there in the morning to see them leave. As they departed in their thousands, the noise suddenly stopped. We saw Marsh Harrier, Cranes and a variety of small birds in the woods and in the reeds. There were large flocks of Golden Plover that shimmied in the sun, and huge flocks of Lapwings with their aerobatic displays. We saw several Great Egrets and a Kingfisher displayed its plumage. We will not forget the ducks and, of course, we now know how to identify them! Lastly, our hotel was in a prime position and the catering was good.

Day 1

Friday 3rd February

We met at 6.30pm for introductions. Group members had mixed birding abilities, and Dave and Andrew assured us of their assistance and advice where and whenever required. Not everyone managed to work out the answer to the picture quiz, which was a Eurasian Teal.

Next it was time for dinner, and there was a wide choice and plenty to eat. After dinner we went to the Exmoor Room and Dave gave a briefing about the Somerset Levels and talked about a few of the birds we are likely to see. After the talk it was time for bed.

Day 2

Saturday 4th February

We left the hotel at 8am after a substantial breakfast. Our first stop was at Greylake. At the car park we spotted Reed Bunting and Song Thrush, and on the other side of the road was a Peregrine, as well as Lapwing, Fieldfare and Golden Plover. We saw our first Water Rail as we entered the reserve, and by the time we reached the Drover's Road we had seen three Water Rails and everyone had managed a view. In the hide we were able to identify the various dabbling ducks. We also saw a lot of Snipe as well as Marsh Harrier and Great Egret. A Chiffchaff impersonated a flycatcher by the hide as it gorged on the flies.

Our next stop was at Aller Moor where the River Parrot was full with water, overflowing the north bank into the fields. We looked for Common Cranes in two places without success. After a stop at the local RSPB Headquarters where we saw a distant Merlin, we visited Swell Wood. We parked in the car park and stood by the vehicles to watch lots of Coal Tits, Blue Tits and Great Tits on the feeders and the seed we put on the ground. A Marsh Tit came and fed a few times as well as a Nuthatch. A Great Spotted Woodpecker was in the trees and we all saw a Treecreeper. In the gap in the trees, two Buzzards circled.

Our last stop of the morning was at the King Alfred Pub at Burrowbridge. After a filling lunch, we drove back to the RSPB Headquarters at West Sedgemoor. On the way we stopped on the side of a railway bridge and saw nine Cranes and a Raven. We parked at the HQ and went along the lane to the hide overlooking the reserve. In the hide the scenery was awesome with huge flocks of Golden Plover, Lapwing and ducks. There was a reasonably

sized flock of Black-tailed Godwits, and other waders included Dunlin. Also there were Marsh Harrier, more Cranes, a pair of Stonechat and a Kingfisher which showed to us all.

Our final stop of the day was at the Ham Wall RSPB reserve. We were here with lots of others to see the Starlings, and we watched lots of them moving around and flying over us. We also saw Tufted Duck and Pochard as well as a Great Egret and a male Marsh Harrier.

Back at the hotel we had dinner, after which Andrew completed the checklist.

Day 3

Sunday 5th February

We had an early start to watch the Starlings leave their roost. On the walk from Ham Wall car park to Tor View hide, we stopped several times to listen to the calls of various birds including the ‘cackling laugh’ of Little Grebe, the ‘squealing piglet’ of Water Rail and the proper ‘quack’ of Gadwall. We sat in the hide and watched a few thousand Starlings move past the hide to another patch of reeds before they flew off together with the sound of rolling thunder. We also saw Starlings streaming away from other sites in six waves.

It was then back to the hotel for a warm breakfast. We said goodbye to a few of the group before heading to Avalon Marshes for a walk along the old railway; through the part managed by Natural England who do it differently to the RSPB reserve at Ham Wall next door. We started at the boardwalk by the car park where we had excellent views of Goldcrest. The wind was rather chilly as we walked to Noah’s hide. Massive flocks of Wigeon moved further away as we opened up the shutters. There were plenty of little fish jumping to the left hand side of the hide, but nothing new on the bird front. Walking back to the main path in the wood, there were Lesser Redpoll and Goldfinch.

Our next stop was at the Crown Inn, Catcott where we had a lovely lunch. Warm and full, we continued, stopping at the Catcott Corner reserve, looked after by the Somerset Wildlife Trust. Once again, there were plenty of duck to test our knowledge. There was also a pair of Stonechat on the reeds.

We then drove back to Ham Wall and said goodbye to another three who headed back to the hotel. The remainder of us joined the throngs for views of the Starlings. Once again, they flew into different sites with thousands coming in to the reeds near us. We saw huge flocks flying in, but there were no huge dances in the sky as they went straight to roost. We left with the crowds, and final goodbyes were said at the hotel. We had enjoyed two excellent days of good weather and excellent views of some of the waders and ducks that inhabit this area in winter. We had also seen Roe Deer, Rabbit and signs of a Badger. We had all learnt something, including that the duck with the rusty head with yellow stripe is a Wigeon, and the one with white, brown, white on its side is a Shoveler!

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Species Lists

Birds (✓=recorded but not counted; H = heard only)

	Common name	Scientific name	February	
			4	5
1	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	H	✓
2	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	2	4
3	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	12	✓
4	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓
5	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	25	✓
6	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	3	3
7	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	✓	✓
8	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	1	
9	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	✓	✓
10	Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Anas penelope</i>	✓	✓
11	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>	✓	✓
12	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	✓	✓
13	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓
14	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	✓	✓
15	Northern Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	✓	✓
16	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	✓	✓
17	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	✓	✓
18	Eurasian Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	10	✓
19	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓
20	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	3	✓
21	Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>	1	
22	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	2	
23	Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	1	
24	Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>	19	
25	Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>	5	H
26	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	✓	✓
27	Common Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	✓	✓
28	European Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>	✓	✓
29	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	✓	✓
30	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	✓	✓
31	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	60	
32	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	20	
33	Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>		4
34	Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓
35	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	✓	✓
36	Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓
37	Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia domestica</i>	✓	✓
38	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>	1	✓
39	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓
40	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>		✓
41	Barn Owl	<i>Tyto alba</i>	1	
42	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>		H
43	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	1	
44	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	1	1
45	Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i>	✓	✓
46	Northern Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	4	3

	Common name	Scientific name	February	
			4	5
47	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	✓	✓
48	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	2	2
49	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	H	
50	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	1	
51	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓
52	Fieldfare	<i>Turdus Pilaris</i>	✓	
53	Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>	✓	
54	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓
55	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	H6	H3
56	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	1	
57	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>		5
58	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	✓	✓
59	Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>	✓	
60	Coal Tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>	✓	
61	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓
62	Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓	✓
63	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	✓	
64	Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>	1	
65	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓
66	Eurasian Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	✓	✓
67	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	✓	✓
68	Carriion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓
69	Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	1	
70	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓
71	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓
72	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓
73	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		1
74	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓
75	Lesser Redpoll	<i>Acanthis flammea cabaret</i>		3
76	Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	✓	✓

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